



October 2024 CHNewsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL

Journeys Home

Was That You, Calling Me By Name?

By Ronda Chervin, Ph. D.

“I have called you by name, you are mine!” (Isaiah 43:1) Thinking back, I imagine that my twin sister and I were among the most alienated little children in New York City. I have never met anyone with our peculiar background. Born in 1937, we were the children of unmarried parents who met in the Communist party, but had left shortly before our birth to become informers for the FBI. Apparently enraged communists threatened to bomb our cradle.



We were also kind of a pro-life miracle in this way—we were conceived during a night of debauchery at a Communist Party gathering. My mother already had many abortions to her name. She was about to have another one until my father, who was an amateur zoologist said, “Don’t abort the baby. I’ll

help you take care of it. Human babies may be as cute as baby animals!” Interestingly, this was also the very time that Jesus was telling Sister Faustina to pray for women seeking abortions. My mother chose to carry her pregnancy to term, and the “baby” turned out to be twins, both of whom would become Catholic leaders one day. I like to boast that my birth is a miraculous cross between St. Faustina and zoology!

Both my father and mother, though militant atheists, had Jewish backgrounds, but neither had been brought up practicing the faith—not

even observing high holidays at home or at a synagogue. As right-wing political atheists of Jewish ancestry, we didn't fit in with anyone around us—not with Catholics, not with the sprinkling of Protestants, certainly not with Orthodox religious Jews in full regalia, nor Reform Jews, nor Zionist atheist Jews, nor left-wing non-Zionist Jews. Later, as a Catholic, I realized that my desire to belong to an identifiable group throughout my life had a psychological as well as a theological reason.

My mother's parents were European Jews who, as professionals, had been invited by the Czar at the end of the 19th century to help modernize Russia. Once they arrived, they became fervent atheistic communists. When news reached their city that the police were rounding up suspicious revolutionaries in the squares to shoot them, my grandparents, their children, and some of their Polish servants, fled to the United States.

Although my grandfather, a doctor, practiced

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...Journeys Home Continued...

medicine among Jewish immigrants mostly from Eastern Europe, the family never spoke Yiddish, a mixture of German and Hebrew. Instead, they exulted in being free-thinking socialist Americans whose brotherhood was with all mankind, certainly not with ghetto Jews. My paternal grandfather, Solomon, was of Sephardic Jewish ancestry, born on the island of Curacao, South America—a descendant of a Spanish family, the De Solas, half of whom became Catholic during the Inquisition. (He was from the Jewish half.) He had migrated to the United States under a program initiated, I believe, by secret Jewish Masons to bring young men to North America. The idea was to enroll them in professional colleges, so that they could eventually become well-to-do high status leaders in Masonic lodges. Solomon De Sola became a Madison Avenue dentist. Since his Masonic connection was secret, I never knew about it until years after my grandfather's death. I casually mentioned to my father how silly it was that some Catholics think there is a Jewish Masonic plot to take over the world. My father laughed at that false allegation but told me my grandfather was a secret Jewish Mason! My grandfather De Sola never observed Jewish holidays. He was an atheist.

My paternal grandmother was a blonde, fragile, Pennsylvania Dutch woman who met my handsome Hispanic grandfather in the dental chair. A deeply believing Christian, Grace Geist De Sola moved up the ladder economically and doctrinally from Quaker to Presbyterian to Episcopal. She never missed a Sunday at church, prayed constantly for her atheist husband, son, and grandchildren, and read the Bible night and day. She was forbidden to mention God or religion to us, upon pain of never seeing us again. After her death I inherited a copy of her Bible printed back in 1876 with inked messages throughout such as "someday I pray that my granddaughters will read this passage." From heaven I hope she knows that both granddaughters became Christian leaders, albeit Roman Catholic. She insisted that her son (my father), Ralph De Sola,

be baptized and attend the Presbyterian Church. Around confirmation time, my father, always brave for good or evil, stood up in the congregation and announced that he was an atheist and walked out of the church.

Growing up, my parents had nothing but scorn and ridicule for my Christian grandmother. She was used as a proof of how only weak and stupid people still believe in God after Nietzsche and evolution had proved God dead or non-existent. However, when we were eight years old, our parents separated for good. During this painful process we were sent for a few weeks to our grandmother's summer cottage on Fire Island. I felt miserable being dumped there indefinitely, in the house of this grandmother who loved us tenderly, but whom I thought of as an idiot and a weakling. Seeing her opportunity to introduce us to Jesus, Grace De Sola insisted, upon pain of missing dessert, that we sing the famous lullaby, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so, Jesus, loves me this I know, yes, Jesus loves me..." Even though, in loyalty to our parents, we acted as if we sang that hymn only under duress, I never forgot the words.

Was that the first time I heard you, Jesus, calling my name?

Fast forward: I was an eleven-year-old New York City girl sitting in public school at one of those old-fashioned wooden desks thoroughly marked with the graffiti carved by sixty years worth of bored pupils—the kind of desk that still had inkwells. Once a week, we had show and tell. Pre-selected students had to get up and display something, like a toy plastic turtle from a Christmas trip to Florida, with a two sentence narrative. Amusing. No pressure, except for the child who had to perform.

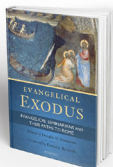
One time, however, something different happened. There was a pause. Probably set up by a Catholic teacher, a quiet boy none of us paid attention to normally came walking in wearing a long black robe with a white linen blouse-like thing on

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

EVANGELICAL EXODUS: NINE STORIES

EDITED BY DOUGLAS BEAUMONT

Over the course a single decade, dozens of students, alumni, and professors from a conservative, Evangelical seminary in North Carolina (Southern Evangelical Seminary) converted to Catholicism. The stories of these converts are now being told by those who know them best—the converts themselves.



CONFESSIONS OF A MEGA CHURCH PASTOR

ALLEN HUNT

Dr. Allen Hunt was born into a Methodist family with a long line of pastors, and went on to be the senior pastor of a mega church in Atlanta. He shares the insights, experiences, and relationships that led him to resign that ministry and enter the Catholic Church.

#3270 - \$3.00



EVANGELICAL IS NOT ENOUGH

THOMAS HOWARD

In these pages, the late Dr. Thomas Howard describes his pilgrimage from Evangelicalism to liturgical Christianity. Non-Catholics will gain an appreciation of the formal and liturgical side of Catholicism; Catholics will see with fresh eyes the beauty of their tradition.

#3031 - \$16.95



...Journeys Home Continued...

top of it. He stood absolutely still, hands steeped in prayer, and started singing *Adeste Fidelis*. It was the first time I had ever heard sacred music. I listened in stunned, bewildered, but joyful, silence.

Was that you, my Jesus, calling my name?

At the time I didn't realize that this lad must have been an altar boy at the Catholic Church. My knowledge of Catholics was limited and negative, though in hindsight, somewhat humorous. We lived in the same neighborhood that is depicted in *West Side Story*. Before the Puerto Ricans came it was partly Jewish and partly Irish Catholic. There were only about two Catholics at the public school because most Catholic children in those days went to the Catholic school. The only ones I recognized on the street were incipient or actual members of gangs. Why did I think they were Catholics? Because in those days all Catholic girls wore crucifixes around their necks and the boys wore scapulars and sometimes also had rosaries dangling out of their pockets. Besides, you could tell they were Catholics because they looked so mean. Since the girls also looked sexy, I used to think that was a mark of a Catholic!

One day I was walking home with my sister and a group of pre-teen boys circled us.

"So, what are you?"

"Are you Catholic?"

"No."

"Are you Protestant?"

"No."

"Are you Jewish?"

"No." (Our parents had never told us we had a Jewish ancestry.)

"So what are you?"

"We're atheists," we answered proudly.

Having never heard of this category, they strolled off instead of beating us up as Christ-killing Jews.

Was that you, Guardian Angel, trying to protect us not only from physical harm but from hatred of Catholics?

How did we eventually find out we were Jewish? Well, the public school was 99% Jewish, so on Jewish holidays everyone had a holiday. When we mentioned at home that we were the only ones there besides two Catholics and one Protestant, our parents reluctantly admitted, "Well, you are Jews. You can stay home." Hurrah!

Summers in New York City were and are torrid. Before air conditioning, fathers would wait until there was no policeman

in sight, bring down a big wrench, and open the fire hydrants so the kids on the block could cool off. It was so much fun jumping up and down in the rushing water that Jewish kids forgot their fear of the Catholic kids and jumped in too.

While affluent Jewish families sent their children off to summer camp in New England or Pennsylvania, we went to the YMCA camp, being poor after the separation of our parents. Although the YMCA was only nominally Christian, there was a tradition of having a Christmas celebration right in the middle of the July session of the camp! A nativity was assembled and the Christian counselors taught all of the campers how to sing carols. If the parents of Jewish children got wind of this, they were allowed to have their kids excused from the practice and the "idoltrous ceremony of kissing the little doll." But my sister and I were atheists, so our mother didn't mind if we learned carols. Superstitious religious stuff was garbage as doctrine, but okay if just an old custom. Hearing *Silent Night* and *Come Holy Night* sung not on the radio but live by beloved counselors, I was enchanted. Such beauty, somehow different from the beauty of secular classical music or popular songs.

Was that you, Mother Mary, calling me by name?

Now we skip to my junior high school English class. The assignment for the day was to write a page about what you want to be when you grow up. It had to be done on the spot. "How can I know what I want to be, if I don't know the meaning of life?" I wrote spontaneously. I don't think I would have remembered this precocious philosophical question, a prophecy of my later choice to become a philosophy professor, had the teacher not graded it an A plus.

Was that you, Holy Spirit, calling me by name?

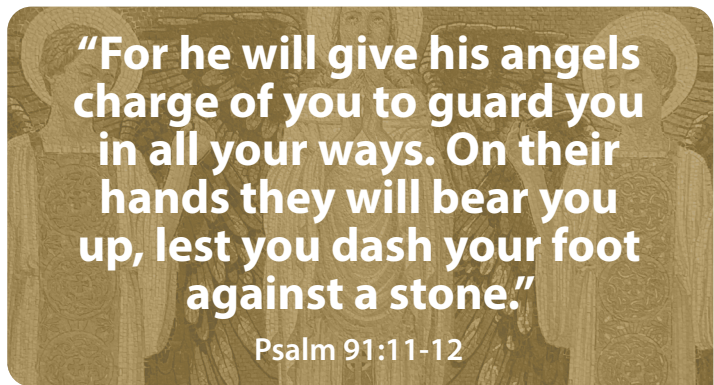
Fast forward again, and I am transferring from City College of New York to the University of Rochester, mainly because I want to have the out-of-town living experience I have read about in books. Looking for pictures for my wall, I gravitated toward a cheap print of Salvador Dali's depiction of the crucifixion, just because of its aesthetic value, I think. Placed in a dorm wing of almost all New York City Jews, the other young women assumed I was a Catholic. Even though they were not very religious, they suggested I take it down since I was Jewish by culture if not by faith. I refused, without knowing why.

Was that you, my Jesus, calling me by name?

Like many, though not all, atheists, I was brought up to think the sexual morality of religious people was ridiculous. Out of fear of pregnancy, I avoided going as far as sexual intercourse. But being on my own, my great wish was to shed my virginity as soon as I could find some attractive young man willing to initiate me. By God's providence I didn't get pregnant, since I would surely have had an illegal abortion if I had.

Was that you, Father of life, protecting me from life-long guilt?

One of my "friends" happened to love the music of Bach. One afternoon he sat me down in the lounge and made me lis-



**"For he will give his angels
charge of you to guard you
in all your ways. On their
hands they will bear you
up, lest you dash your foot
against a stone."**

Psalm 91:11-12



God's Superabundant Love



Dear Friends,

In this month of October, dedicated to the Holy Rosary and filled with the feast days of so many great saints, we are given a unique reminder of God's amazing and superabundant love. On October 2nd, the Church celebrates the feast of the "Guardian Angels." Let us take a moment to consider our mysterious spiritual companions and what their existence

and activity teach us about God and mankind.

Of the Guardian Angels, the Catechism notes in paragraph 336:

From its beginning until death, human life is surrounded by their watchful care and intercession. "Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life." Already here on earth the Christian life shares by faith in the blessed company of angels and men united in God.

We recall Christ's words in the Gospel of Matthew upon which the doctrine and devotion to Guardian Angels is partially based:

"See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven" (Mt. 18:10).

Consider the way in which Christ casually, almost offhandedly, lets slip this beautiful and terrible secret of the supernatural economy of heaven! As Saint Jerome, a doctor of the Church writing in the 4th Century noted: *"How great is the dignity of souls, that each person has from birth received an angel to protect it."* On this great feast we are reminded not only of God's love—but indeed of the remarkable *superabundance* of His love.

The doctrine of the angels—their ranks, roles, names, and mysterious appearances throughout Holy Scripture—can seem an almost scandalous superfluity. Why all these extra and apparently unnecessary additions to the simplicity of the Gospel? This is sometimes the sentiment of those who approach the Catholic Church from Protestant traditions in which "Roman baggage" has been pruned away in favor of a simpler and purer Gospel. Apologetic arguments abound in defense of devotion to Mary, prayer to the saints and angels, and other apparently "ornamental" doctrines of the Catholic Church (you can find them at CHNetwork.org and many other helpful Catholic websites). However, what I think is most important here is to reflect on what the existence of the "Guardian Angels" implies about God's love for His people.

We truly cannot fathom God's great love and tenderness toward every human soul. So many of Jesus' parables and images come down to trying to convince us of this fact:

"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's will. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows." (Mt. 10:29-31)

God intimately knows and loves every single person He has created. He is present to us, He heals and forgives us, and He has a glorious plan for our lives. And as if this wasn't already more than enough, God the Father has created and commissioned an angel to guard and guide each of His *little ones*—spiritual guardians who are ever beholding the face of the Father and entering into spiritual battle on our behalf.

On a purely practical and pedagogical level, God knows that we need these seeming "extras" of the faith—Mary, the saints, the angels, and the various devotions to them. Why? Because our intellects are clouded by sin and our imaginations are far too limited to even begin to conceive of the superabundant nature of Our Heavenly Father's love. When we come to recognize the piercing holiness of Jesus' mother Mary or the other great saints throughout history, our vision of God's own unimaginable holiness—which must be infinitely greater than theirs—is not diminished, but rather greatly expanded. When we grapple with the reality that (according to Christ Himself) the Angelic choir includes not only great warriors like Michael the Archangel and messengers like Gabriel, but indeed Guardian Angels assigned to every "little one," our vision of God's amazing love and tender concern for us grows—especially when we acknowledge these Angels, and we ask and thank them for their spiritual help.

In response to this superabundant love of God, we strive as Christians to be more than mere "box checkers"—trying to figure out the minimum necessary requirements for salvation and calling it a day. Rather, in imitation of Christ, whose love always overflows throughout creation and salvation history, we seek to return the same. We strive to give proper worship to God through constant prayer, continual conversion of our lives, and our faithful participation in His great gift of the sacrifice of the Mass. We honor Christ's mother and His great saints, seeing in them the reflection of their creator and savior. And out of love for Christ, we seek to do good to "the least of [His] brethren" (Mt. 25:40) for each of whom he has created and appointed a Guardian Angel.

As we continue this journey, surrounded as we are by so great a cloud of witnesses and spiritual companions, may we recognize in a new way the incredible love that God has for us—and may we strive to imitate that love always.

In Christ,



Jonathan M. Grodi

JonMarc Grodi

RIPPLE EFFECT

BLESSED CARLO ACUTIS & RAJESH MOHUR

By Matt Swaim

The story of Bl. Carlo Acutis, who is on his way to becoming the Church's first canonized saint from the Millennial generation, has captured the hearts and imaginations of both Catholics and non-Catholics alike. Carlo was born on May 3, 1991, just three months before the first web browser was introduced to the world, and he died on October 12, 2006, less than a month after Facebook became available to the general public. His life was bookended by two incredibly significant developments of the digital age, and in his short lifetime, he used that developing technology to promote information about Eucharistic miracles in a project that has since been viewed by millions.

While so many know Carlo for his global impact through digital media and his traveling Eucharistic miracles display, his witness of faith to those closest to him bore important and lasting fruit. In that sense, Carlo is like many of the clergy converts we work with who may have had public platforms to share their testimony, but whose deepest desire is that their own friends and family join them in the Catholic Faith.

In Carlo's case, his faith was not something necessarily instilled in him by his parents; their work had them traveling all over Europe, and it often took priority over their participation in the sacraments. But they did take the step of having Carlo baptized as an infant, and as he grew older, those graces began to bear fruit.

Carlo's insistence on making Mass a priority—almost from the time he learned to talk—meant his family began to make it a priority as well; his mother has since spoken at length about the impact of her son on her own return to faith. But beyond his own nuclear family, Carlo also had a significant impact on another close and important figure in his life: his caretaker, Rajesh.

Rajesh Mohur came from a Hindu family of the Brahmin caste in Mauritius. Carlo's family was well off enough to hire him as a full-time housekeeper and overseer of Carlo's activities. He soon came to realize that this would be no ordinary caretaking job! Whereas other kids might constantly be asking to stop the car for fast food, Rajesh found that every time they passed a Catholic church, Carlo would ask to stop and go in to pray before the Blessed Sacrament. Carlo's care and concern for the poor affected Rajesh as well. When they passed a man sleeping on the street, Carlo wanted to help, but Rajesh suggested they move on. However,



Carlo insisted on procuring a sleeping bag for the man, and a home cooked meal, telling Rajesh, "this man in difficulty should eat like we do, too."

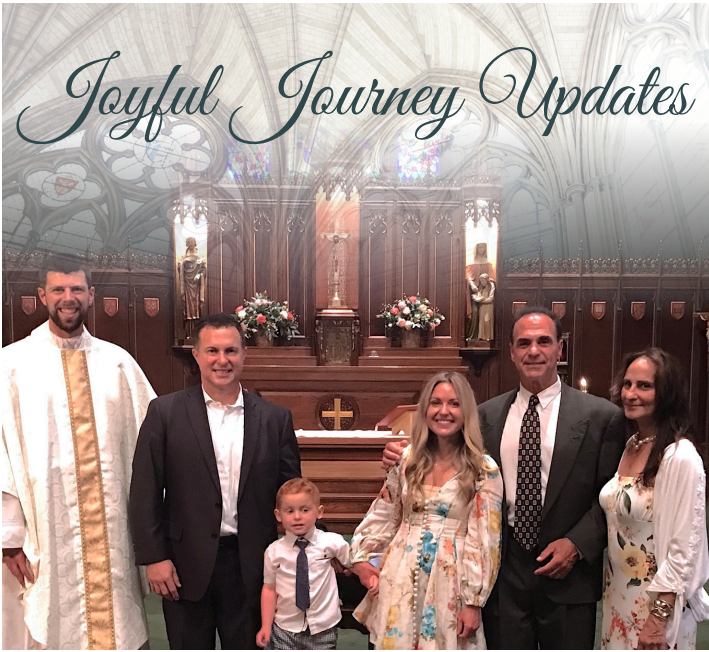
Over time, the persistence and deep faith of Carlo Acutis began to affect Rajesh profoundly. When they would visit churches, Rajesh would ask Carlo questions about what he was praying about and experiencing, and Carlo would do his best to try and explain his childlike Catholic faith to an adult from a different religious background than his own. Carlo's persistence with the local convent resulted in him being allowed to receive his First Communion a year early, at age seven, on June 16, 1998. A year later, his friend and caretaker Rajesh, who he had helped catechize, requested and received Baptism in the Catholic Church.

In May of 2024, the Vatican announced that the miracle necessary for Carlo Acutis to become a fully canonized saint was approved; a 21-year old Costa Rican woman who suffered a severe head injury after a bicycle accident made a rapid and full recovery after her mother prayed for Carlo's intercession. And so the ripple effects of Carlo's Christian witness continue to extend and enrich the Communion of Saints.

For so many of the converts we work with, Carlo's story is a particularly meaningful sign of hope. Like many of the pastors who once spoke to full congregations as Protestants, and perhaps as Catholics now have a global audience through podcasts, books, and public speaking, their most intense prayers are often for the ones closest to them. They want to reach a broad audience with their testimonies, as they once did from their Protestant pulpits; but they want even more for their friends and family to share their experience of Christ in the sacraments. They want their witness to touch their families, as Carlo's witness touched his, and they want it to impact their friends, as Carlo's witness impacted his friend Rajesh.

Blessed Carlo Acutis, pray for us!
Feast Day: October 12th

Joyful Journey Updates



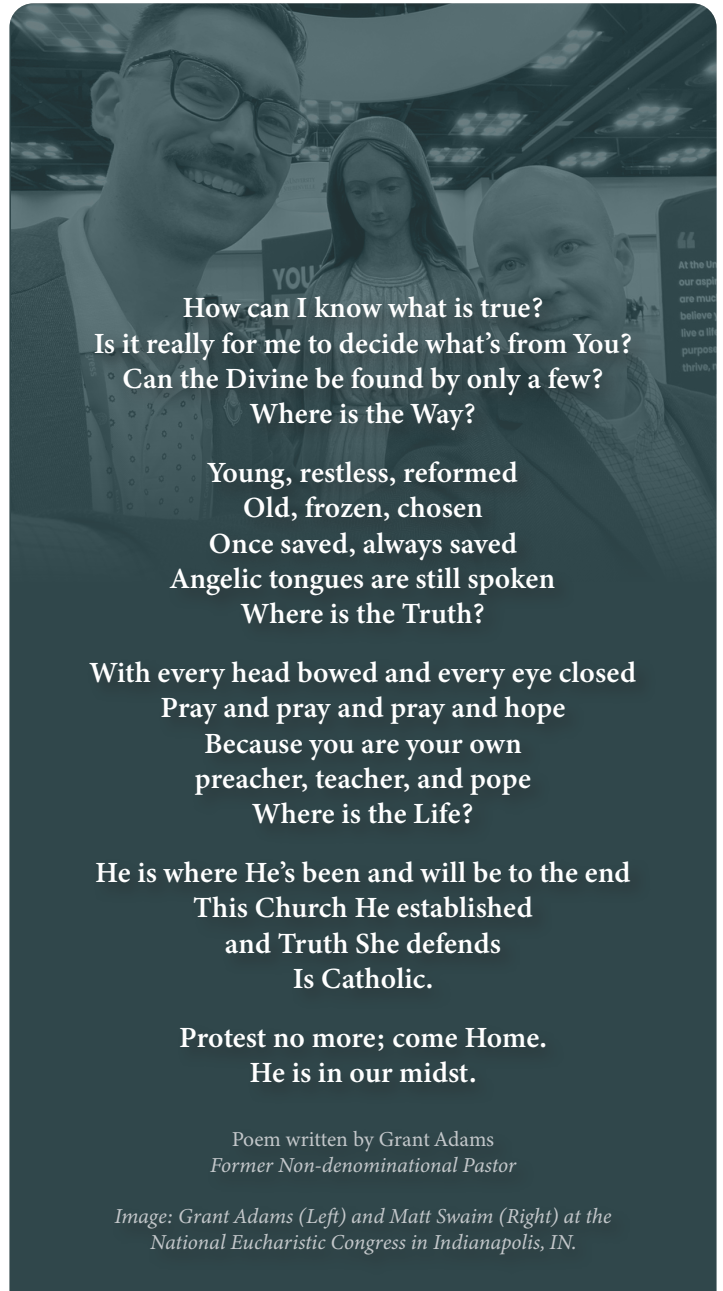
Mick Souza, Catholic revert

I have been a coach for 45 years now. My athletes have won state, regional, national, and even world titles. I love to win as much as anyone. However, for me there is one thing better than winning, and that is leading an athlete to Jesus. On a very special day in July this year, four sacraments were received by one of those athletes. Brittany was baptized, received her first communion, was confirmed, and had her marriage convalidated in the Church. Ben and Brittany's son was also baptized! My wife Carla and I are blessed to be their Godparents. This day will be etched in my mind forever. All glory to God!

....

Mick Souza, who won the Mr. Universe title in 1992, was a guest on EWTN's The Journey Home in October of 2022. Watch his episode online at chnetwork.org/mruniverse

**Do you have a journey update to share?
Submit it to info@chnetwork.org.**



How can I know what is true?
Is it really for me to decide what's from You?
Can the Divine be found by only a few?
Where is the Way?

Young, restless, reformed
Old, frozen, chosen
Once saved, always saved
Angelic tongues are still spoken
Where is the Truth?

With every head bowed and every eye closed
Pray and pray and pray and hope
Because you are your own
preacher, teacher, and pope
Where is the Life?

He is where He's been and will be to the end
This Church He established
and Truth She defends
Is Catholic.

**Protest no more; come Home.
He is in our midst.**

Poem written by Grant Adams
Former Non-denominational Pastor

Image: Grant Adams (Left) and Matt Swaim (Right) at the National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis, IN.

EWTN'S THE JOURNEY HOME on television & radio, hosted by JonMarc Grodi, CHNetwork Executive Director

Monday, Oct. 7

Fr. Jerry Byrd

*Former Southern Baptist
Pastor*

Monday, Oct. 14

Eduardo Faria

*Former Presbyterian
Pastor*

Monday, Oct. 21

Kent Hill

Former Nazarene

Monday, Oct. 28

Fr. Boniface Hicks

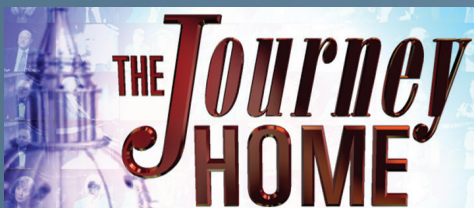
Former Atheist

Orig. Air Date: 7/27/20

Monday, Nov. 4

Megan Thomas

*Former Evangelical
Protestant*



TELEVISION

Mon. 8PM ET—Encores: Tues. 1AM ET, Thurs. 2PM ET
The Best of The Journey Home: Sat. 6PM ET

RADIO

Mon. 8PM ET—Encores: Sat. 7 AM ET, Sun. 1 AM ET
and 5 PM ET *The Best of The Journey Home*:
Mon.–Fri. 1 AM ET

*Schedule is subject
to change.*

To access the full archive of past *Journey Home* programs go to chnetwork.org/journey-home

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The Coming Home
Network International



CHNetwork



ComingHomeNetwork

CHNetwork was founded to help men and women, clergy and laity, from every background imaginable, discover the truth and beauty of the Catholic Church and make the journey home.

Angel of God Prayer

Angel of God,
My guardian dear,
To whom God's love
commits me here,
Ever this day be at my side,
To light and guard, to rule and guide.
Amen.

“We have been called to
heal wounds, to unite
what has fallen apart, and
to bring home those who
have lost their way.”

St. Francis of Assisi—Feast Day: October 4

COMPASS

SUPPORT THE CHNETWORK!

Join **COMPASS**—an ever-growing community of donors who give a monthly gift of \$10-\$100 (or more) to support the CHNetwork as we help to guide men and women who are coming home to the Catholic Church.

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GUIDE

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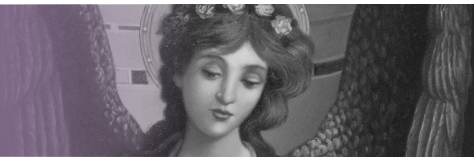
NAVIGATOR

\$100/month

www.CHNetwork.org/Compass

Please contact Ann at 740-450-1175 or via email ann@chnetwork.org if you have any questions.

Prayer List



Clergy

■ **For Caleb, a young Presbyterian pastor** who was immediately removed from ministry when he told his elder board that he was heading in the direction of the Catholic Church, that the Holy Spirit will lead him as attempts to lead his family.

■ **For Corbin, a young newly-wed Protestant pastor** who has been exposed to the writings of the early Church and begun to struggle with how Catholic they seem to be, that God will give him much wisdom as he continues to pursue the truth for his ministry and family.

■ **For Jerome, a Protestant missionary** who has begun to wrestle with the claims of the Catholic Church, that the Holy Spirit will lead him in his studies.

■ **For Joseph, who after many years as a pastor in various Protestant denominations** has begun to explore Catholic teaching and finds himself drawn to the Church, that the Lord will encourage him as he attempts to communicate what he is learning to his family.

■ **For Nickolas, a Lutheran pastor** who hasn't a clue as to how he would support his family if he were to leave his pastoral ministry to enter the Catholic Church, that the Lord will open a path for him.

■ **For Daniel, a Protestant minister** raised by extremely anti-Catholic parents who has recently come to believe that "Bible only" Christianity cannot be true and finds himself on a path toward the Church, that the Holy Spirit will give him the courage to follow His lead.

■ **For Keith, a former Pentecostal pastor** and church planter who finds himself on a journey back to the Catholic Church, that the Lord will give him success in bringing his family along with him.

■ **For James, a Lutheran minister and chaplain** who will enter the Church this October and is working to navigate the steps involved in becoming a Catholic chaplain, that the Lord will bless him in this endeavor.

■ **For Jay, a non-denominational pastor** with a wife and four children who feels drawn back to the Catholic Church in which he was raised and is meeting regularly with a Catholic priest, that the Lord will lead him home.

■ **For Michael, an Anglican priest** who very much wants to become a Catholic priest of the Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter and bring his entire congregation into the Catholic Church, that the Lord will clear a path for him.

■ **For Steve, a pastor in the Reformed Church in America** who feels strongly drawn toward the Catholic Church, that the Holy Spirit will open his wife's heart to the things he has tried, unsuccessfully so far, to share.

■ **For Jeremiah, an Evangelical pastor** struggling deeply with how he would make a living and support his family if he were to leave his current position to become Catholic, that God will give him courage and wisdom.

■ **For John, a Baptist pastor** who has been attracted to Catholicism for some time but struggles with some of the things he sees happening in the Church, that the Lord will help him work through these difficulties.

Lay

■ **For Everett, a Non-denominational Evangelical**, that all of his children and grandchildren would join him and his wife on their journey into the Catholic Church.

■ **For Dane, an agnostic former Mormon**, that our Lord Jesus would open his heart to the truth of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

■ **For Samuel and his wife, both Non-denominational Evangelicals**, who are at the beginning of exploring the Catholic Faith, that the Holy Spirit may guide them.

■ **For Paul, an Anglican** in Australia, that his journey, inspired by his grandson, would lead him home to the Catholic Church.

■ **For Matthew, who is on a journey** out of the occult and New Age, that he may find freedom in the love and grace of Jesus Christ.

■ **For Barry, a former member of the Churches of Christ**, that he may find all the answers he needs to guide him into full-communion with the Catholic Church.

■ **For Allister, a Protestant** who is seeking the fullness of the truth, that his reading and research would guide him to the Eucharistic altar of Jesus.

■ **For Ethan, a Nazarene**, that his struggles with finding faith would be fulfilled in the discovery of the apostolic truth of the Catholic Faith.

■ **For Nathaniel, an Anglican** in Malaysia, that the Holy Spirit would guide his every step on his journey to full-communion with the Catholic Church.

■ **For Julian, a Pentecostal**, that he may be given grace to understand the Catholic Faith and that his friends and family will accept his interest in the Church.

■ **For Bethany, who is on the journey**, that God may provide healing for her brother Jared who has brain cancer and consolation for her mom, Tina, who is in a lot of pain over this.

■ **For LaPriel, a Mormon**, that God would guide her in the direction He desires her to go.

■ **For Leslie, a recent convert**, that her continued journey of faith would be filled with knowledge and guidance from the Lord.

■ **For Joyce, a recent convert**, that she may return to daily Mass, receive the grace to suffer well, and be granted relief from illness.

■ **For Molly, a recent convert**, that the Lord would guide her in her discernment of colleges, and grant her the grace to build holy relationships.

■ **For Ali, a Presbyterian**, that she may experience a closer relationship with God as He guides her into a deeper understanding of Him, and that she may grow in confidence as she moves away from home to begin college.

A Lutheran Discovers the Rosary

by Billy Kangas

This year marks the 11th anniversary of my conversion to Catholicism, the most significant decision of my life. One of the most profound influences on my conversion was the impact of various individual Catholics living the faith. Their witness helped me become open to one of the most challenging aspects of my journey: the Rosary.

Growing up in a Lutheran (Missouri Synod) household, I was taught to be wary of the Catholic Church. Our chapel services often emphasized that the Church had turned the grace of God into something that could be bought or earned. I believed that Catholics were, at best, misguided and, at worst, outright heretics.

As a high school student, I began to encounter God personally as a living and active force in my life. My faith became my own and central to who I was. However, I was being disciplined by men who held strongly anti-Catholic views. They cautioned me against Catholicism, describing it as diabolical and deeply problematic. We would read books on the dangers of Catholicism and distribute Bible tracts, some by Jack Chick, who often harshly condemned Catholics.

Despite this, the lives and faith of the Catholics I knew caused me to doubt some of what I was hearing. Many of the most thoughtful and faith-oriented people I knew were Catholics. I told myself that they were Christians *in spite* of their Catholicism, yet I found myself curious.

It was during this time that I also encountered Catholic street evangelists. Living in Ann Arbor, Michigan, I attended the annual Art Fair, which included booths where organizations could share their missions and beliefs. One day, I came across a big white table covered in rosaries. I had seen rosaries before, and they always made me uncomfortable. I didn't know much about them, but I had heard people praying them and believed it was the very definition of vain, repetitious prayer and idolatry since people were praying to Mary, not to God. Yet, I was curious.

An older man at the table offered me a rosary for free,

which I took and put in my pocket. Later that day, I threw away most of the items I had been given at the Art Fair, but I couldn't bring myself to throw away the rosary. I wasn't sure what to do with it. I knew it was a prayer tool, but I didn't feel comfortable praying the Hail Mary. I thought perhaps I could try just praying with the beads in my hands. I would go on prayer walks and simply hold the beads as I prayed. I liked it because it gave me a physical reality to the action of praying.

After months of this, I finally decided to try praying a real Rosary with the Hail Marys and everything. I found a pamphlet on how to pray the Rosary and went through it. I began to realize that the Rosary was not prayer to Mary, but prayer with Mary about Jesus. As I reflected on each of the mysteries, the prayers reminded me of Mary's great love for Jesus and her role in His life. I began to see Mary as an example of someone who loved Jesus deeply. I started asking Jesus to make me more like Mary, and eventually believed that Mary could pray for me to become more like Jesus too.

This experience with the Rosary was a crack in the armor of suspicion I had built against Catholicism. It helped me become willing to try the things Catholics did instead of fearing them. In the end, it was my experience of the depth and beauty of Catholic spirituality that made my conversion to the Catholic Church a leap I was ready to take --- a beauty opened up to me through the witness of both friends and strangers, willing to live their faith in an open and invitation-al way. ■

Billy Kangas is a convert from the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS). Following his conversion, Billy dedicated himself to working with poor and vulnerable populations, particularly through his role at the Pope Francis Center in Detroit, where he works tirelessly to end chronic homelessness in the city. He lives in Michigan with his wife and their five boys, continuing his mission to serve and uplift those in need.

JOIN US FOR PRAYER We now have FIVE weekly opportunities for members of the CHNetwork Online Community to come together LIVE via Zoom video Call.

THE HOLY ROSARY

Mondays at 4:30pm ET

MORNING PRAYER

(Lauds from Liturgy of the Hours)

Thursdays at 10:15am ET

BOOK CLUB

Thursdays at 10:30am ET

FELLOWSHIP FRIDAY

Fridays at 2:00pm ET

THE DIVINE MERCY CHAPLET

Fridays at 3:00pm ET (Follows Fellowship Friday on the same call)

Information about each of these events and information about them can be found in the "Community Prayer" and "Book Club" spaces at community.chnetwork.org



...Journeys Home Continued...

ten to Bach's *Wachet Auf*. I didn't like choral music at all, but I sat riveted to the chair listening with profound attention to the sacred song.

Was that you Jesus, calling me by name?

My third intimate male friend was a foreign student in the philosophy graduate program. He was a German who had been in the Nazi Youth as a teen, but who had been saved by a Catholic priest from remaining in that terrible movement. Many of his friends became Catholic because of the ministry of the priest. He did not, but he believed that Catholicism was the only road to salvation! He hoped to become a Catholic someday after sowing his wild oats. This man started feeding me apologetic books from G. K. Chesterton to Karl Adam. Not having ever read the New Testament, I hardly understood a word of these treatises. But something stuck because I started wanting to meet Catholics even after my relationship with the German broke up.

Was that you, St. Mary Magdalene, calling me by name?

During a trip, a friend wanted to visit the National Museum of Art in Washington, D.C. Hanging on a wall was Salvador Dali's *Last Supper*. I didn't like the picture at all from an aesthetic point of view, but I felt glued to the spot. I stared and stared at the table and the Christ feeling mystically drawn into it. Fifteen minutes later my Jewish friend had to drag me away.

Was that you, Jesus of the Eucharist, calling me by name?

Majoring in philosophy had been my way of searching for truth. In the secular universities I attended, skepticism was so much in vogue that by a year of graduate school I felt hopeless. Where was truth? Where was love? Why even live? In this frame of mind, during Thanksgiving vacation in NYC, 1958, my mother, who never watched TV during the day and

never surfed channels, turned on a program called *The Catholic Hour*. The guests were Dietrich Von Hildebrand and Alice Jourdain, soon to become Von Hildebrand. They were talking about truth and love. Spontaneously I wrote a letter to them, care of the station, telling them of my unsuccessful search for truth.

It turned out they both lived on the West Side of NYC—Alice two blocks from me and Dietrich 10 blocks from me. Alice invited me for a visit. Her roommate, Madeleine (later to become the wife of Lyman Stebbins, founder of Catholics United for the Faith) met me at the door and ushered me into a small room. There was this very European looking woman (she came from Belgium during World War II) who looked at me with such intense interest I was immediately drawn into her heart. She suggested I sit in on classes of Dietrich Von Hildebrand and Balduin Schwarz, his disciple, at Fordham University. Balduin's son, Stephen, a philosophy graduate student, now a philosophy professor and pro-life apologist, could bring me up to the Bronx and show me around.

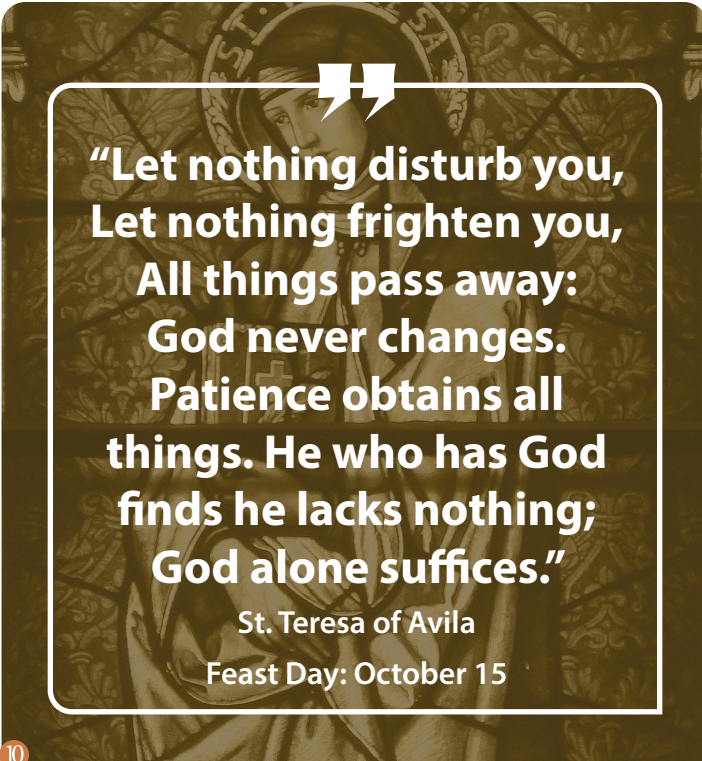
I sat in on a few classes. What impressed me most was not the ideas of these Catholic philosophers which I didn't understand very well, but their personal vitality and joy. The skepticism, relativism, and historicism that characterized most secular universities at that time left many of the professors sad and dessicated. Drawn to this joy, as well as the loving friendliness with which everyone in this circle of Catholics moved out to greet a newcomer, I quickly switched from Johns Hopkins to Fordham to continue my studies. That the wife of Balduin Schwarz was a Jewish woman who had converted from an atheistic background certainly also made my entry into this new phase of my life easier.

After a few months at Fordham, I could not help but wonder how come the brilliant lay Catholics and the brilliant Jesuits in the philosophy department could believe ideas such as the existence of God, the divinity of Christ, the reality of objective truth, moral absolutes, and the need for Church-going. Obviously it was not only stupid and weak people who thought this way. What is more, they could prove that the mind could know truth and that there were universal ethical truths in a few sentences.

Was that you, Holy Spirit, removing road-blocks to my eventual conversion to the Absolute Truth which is a Trinity of Persons? Were you calling me by name?

I was sad to think that I would not be able to study with these wonderful people during the summer since they went back to Europe every year during those months. By now I found it hard to enjoy my sinful relationships with cynical, if interesting, men. Unexpectedly Professor Schwarz suggested I go on a Catholic Art Tour with them. My money problems could be solved by a scholarship. Later I realized this money was probably donated by one of those in the circle in the hope that deeper acquaintance with my professor would facilitate conversion.

To understand the miraculous character of the events that follow you have to know I hated all but modern art. This was



**“Let nothing disturb you,
Let nothing frighten you,
All things pass away:
God never changes.
Patience obtains all
things. He who has God
finds he lacks nothing;
God alone suffices.”**

St. Teresa of Avila

Feast Day: October 15

...Journeys Home Continued...

owing to forced trips to museums as a child. I liked colorful impressionistic pictures but nothing earlier than the 20th century, and certainly not old-fashioned Catholic art. And, even though by now I thought there was truth, I had no knowledge of God, Christ, or the Church and no interest in learning more. So, my only reason for going on the tour was to cling to my dear new friends.

The first miracle came when I saw Chartres Cathedral in France. I looked at the amazing shape of that Church with the beautiful stained glass windows and I started to cry. The line from Keats: "Beauty is truth, truth is beauty," came to mind and I asked myself, "How could this be so beautiful if there is no truth to it, just medieval ignorance?"

Wasn't that you, God of Beauty, calling me by name?

The pilgrims on the Catholic Art Tour all went to daily Mass. I started going also out of curiosity. Seeing my noble wise philosophy professor on his knees astounded and disgusted me. I wanted to jerk him up and say no man should kneel. "You are the captain of your soul, you are the master of your fate."

Finding out that I had never read the New Testament, and seizing the moment of grace, Schwarz, my godfather to be, searched through bookstores in Southern France until he found a Bible in English for me.

The second miracle occurred on the tour bus. Reading the Gospels without understanding much, I fell asleep. I had a dream. There was a large room with tables. Jesus and Mary were sitting with their backs to the wall. Mary beckoned me and said in Hebrew "Come, sit with us." (I don't know Hebrew, but in the dream I did.)

Wasn't that you, Blessed Lady of Zion, calling me by name?

The third miracle? I got the impulse to kneel on the floor of the hotel and say a skeptic's prayer I thought my professor had told me as a joke:

"God, if there is a God, save my soul, if I have a soul."

The next day we hit Lourdes. My godparents to be, the Schwarzes, were praying that I would not be put off by the rows of trinket vendors. I said, "I'm used to 42nd St., nothing bothers me." It was here I would experience a fourth miracle. I was touched to the core by the Immaculate Mary hymn of the pilgrims sung in candlelight procession in many languages.

Wasn't that you, dear Immaculate Mother, calling me by name?

Then came a fifth miracle. Again, the art I thought I hated was used by God to reach me. In a museum in Florence, I saw Da Vinci's unfinished nativity. I looked at the Virgin Mary, so simple, pure, and sweet, and I wept. She had something I would never have: purity! For the first time I thought of myself as a sinner. I felt impelled to tell my mentors, sure they would banish me. Of course, they didn't. Jesus came to save sinners.

Wasn't that you, Our Lady, who called me by name?

Shortly after came the sixth miracle. The face of Christ in

a tapestry of Raphael came alive, not for the others, but just for me!

Wasn't that you, my Jesus, calling me by name?

Finally, a seventh miracle took place. Our tour included a public audience with Pope Pius XII at St. Peter's. I had dreaded being bored at museums, but having to be in a crowd watching the Pope, who I thought of vaguely as dressed up in the gold that belonged to the poor, was more than I could stand. I would go shopping instead. My mild-mannered professor insisted I go. So I went. At the end of the ceremony, the Pope was blessing the disabled and sick. It was hard to see him because of the crowd. My rather old, and not very strong, godfather-to-be lifted me up so I could see the charity on the face of the Holy Father. Pope Pius XII had exactly the same expression in his eyes as the living face of Jesus from the tapestry.

Dear Holy Spirit, was that not you prompting my godfather? Was that not you, calling me by name?

Stunned by this profusion of supernatural happenings, but too much a thinker to proceed on that basis only, I studied books like C. S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity*. Lewis' famous trilemma was an intellectual turning point. He shows that it is no good fence-sitting by deciding Jesus was just a wonderful man or a prophet. When a man claims to be divine, he is either really God, insane, or a liar. Since no one thinks Jesus was insane or a liar, he must have been divine. Reading books of Chesterton and Cardinal Newman made becoming a Catholic seem inevitable.

Wasn't that you, dear Holy Trinity, Mother Mary, Guardian Angel, all you saints, especially St. Edith Stein, calling me by name?

On January 4, 1959, at the age of 21, I was baptized. There has never been a moment in my life when I have regretted being a Catholic. For fifty years I taught Catholic philosophy at various universities and seminaries. It seemed that my witness of changing from atheism to passionate belief in the teachings of the Church was a powerful incentive for doubting Catholic students to pay attention.

Later my twin sister, my mother, and my husband also became Catholics, making us into a Hebrew-Catholic family. The way God saved them and me during the rest of my long life can be found in my autobiography, *En Route to Eternity*. ■

Ronda Chervin converted to the Catholic Faith from a Jewish, though atheistic, background and has been a Professor of Philosophy and Theology at Loyola Marymount University, the Seminary of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, and Franciscan University of Steubenville, Our Lady of Corpus Christi, and Holy Apostles Seminary and College in Connecticut. She is a dedicated widow, mother, and grandmother. Dr. Ronda is the author of some seventy Catholic books and presents on EWTN and other Catholic media.

The Coming Home Network International
PO Box 8290
Zanesville, OH 43702-8290

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November 11-14, 2024

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Intended for converts and those on the journey to Catholicism, both clergy and laity, CHN retreats are an opportunity to gather with the CHNetwork staff and other members of the network for a time of discussion, prayer, and worship. As we share our stories of how Christ drew us to the Church, the obstacles we faced, and the difficulties involved in finding a home in the Catholic Church, our goal is to promote Christian fellowship among the attendees, assist in discernment for those who are facing tough questions or decisions, and to encourage all in an ever greater walk with Christ. **Find full details and register at chnetwork.org/retreats.**

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